

# ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WITH

JOHN WALLACE

JULY 11, 2006

CACTUS FLATS, SOUTH DAKOTA

INTERVIEWED BY MICHAEL HOSKING

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## ABSTRACT

John Wallace was born and raised in Kansas City, Kansas. He joined the U. S. Air Force in May of 1962. Once in the Air Force, Wallace was trained in electronics and stationed at Ellsworth Air Force Base. Once there, Wallace worked on the closed circuit TV and radio systems on the Titan Missile Systems in South Dakota. He then switched over to the Minuteman system soon after. Wallace was in the capsule working when President John F. Kennedy was assassinated. He got out of the Air Force in November of 1965.

## EDITORIAL NOTICE

This is a transcript of a recorded interview conducted for Minuteman Missile National Historic Site. After a draft of this transcript was made, the park provided a copy to the interviewee and requested that he or she return the transcript with any corrections or modifications that he or she wished to be included in the final transcript. The interviewer, or in some cases another qualified staff-member, also reviewed the draft and compared it to the tape recordings. The corrections and other changes suggested by the interviewee and interviewer have been incorporated into this final transcript. Stylistic matters, such as punctuation and capitalization, follow the Chicago Manual of Style, 14<sup>th</sup> edition. The transcript includes bracketed notices at the end of one CD and the beginning of the next so that, if desired, the reader can find a section of the recording more easily by using this transcript.

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INFORMANT: JOHN WALLACE  
INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL HOSKING  
DATE: 11 JULY 2006

JOHN WALLACE: Okay. We're doing an oral history, and it's July 11th, 2006, and the oral history is with John Wallace. First of all, we'd just like to find out some very, very basic information from you. Not to get too personal, but we were just wondering your birth date and location.

MICHAEL HOSKING: June 1st, 1940, Kansas City, Kansas.

HOSKING: You don't live too far from there now. How long have you been in Independence?

WALLACE: We moved up there in 1978.

HOSKING: So, for quite a while.

WALLACE: Yeah, it's been for a while. I lived in that area almost all my life, except while I was in the military.

HOSKING: With the military, when did you join the Air Force? Was it a joining? I don't know if they could draft on the Air Force or not.

WALLACE: Well, I got draft papers for the army, and I decided I'd join the Air Force instead and get an education or something, so I went in to electronics. That was in May of 1962.

HOSKING: And how long did you serve?

WALLACE: Well, I got out a few months early because I was rotating from the Philippines back to the States. Rather than assign me to another station there, they just let me out. It was about five or six months early, I think.

HOSKING: And you mentioned that was in 1964?

WALLACE: No. Actually, I got out in November of '65, I think.

HOSKING: For the Air Force, like I mentioned earlier, my father's army, so I know how that works. Air Force, did you do basic training?

WALLACE: Yeah. I went to basic training down at Lackland Air Force Base. We completed fifteen weeks there. The people that were going to electronic schools, which happened to be Biloxi, Mississippi, they let us finish our basic training over there. We went over there for several more weeks. I think it was three more weeks or something. Where we completed our basic

training. Then we started electronics school there, which lasted for. . . mine was a thirty-two week course, I believe, in ground radio maintenance.

HOSKING: Then how did you get into the missile side of it?

WALLACE: That's a good story there. After completing my training there at Biloxi, I got stationed up here at Ellsworth Air Force Base, near Rapid City. I had worked in radio electronics for about a month or two when they were turning the Titan Missile Program over to the Air Force because they were phasing it out. So they selected some of our group to get into the closed circuit television part of the Titan Missile Program. We had to go back to Offutt Air Force Base in Nebraska. We went to a school down there for about seven weeks, I think. Then we came back and we took over the closed circuit television systems and security systems for the Titan Missile Site. Whenever they had these practice runs with the Titan missiles, where they raise them up, we'd have to go out and install closed circuit television cameras, and take care of the cameras in the Launch Control Center there. We also took care of the monitors and all the wiring and all that stuff.

HOSKING: So the closed circuit were a specific time period. You didn't always have the cameras everywhere? You just had to come out during those tests?

WALLACE: Right. We'd bring the cameras out for the tests. We'd mount them on the frame where the Titan missiles were at, and they'd raise the whole system. That way they could see it on their monitors, how it was working and so there weren't any problems.

HOSKING: I guess you installed multiple ones down into the silo?

WALLACE: Right. We'd put them at different levels. I think there were six or seven levels there. We'd have to go out on about a foot wide I-beam, and there'd be a connector out there and we'd mount our cameras on there. Then they'd do their run, and then we'd come back a couple days later and just take them back off and take them to another site if they had another practice run going at that time.

HOSKING: For the security, you said you worked on that a little bit? As in the system, not the site security.

WALLACE: Oh yeah. Well, we had TV cameras outside also that we would have to climb up these towers and install them whenever they were getting ready to run the missiles up out of the ground, so they could get an outside view to the security of that area. In the wintertime . . . these towers were like seventy-five feet tall, and we'd have to carry the camera over our shoulder, climb the tower, install the camera, and climb back down. And it was so cold you wouldn't believe it.

HOSKING: And how windy?

WALLACE: I don't know. It seemed like it was blowing seventy-five miles an hour all the time, but it was very windy. As a matter of fact, we'd go up and put the thing in, and somebody else would go up and we'd come down, because it was so cold, our hands were so numb. We'd come down and another person would go up and finish installing the wiring and all kind of stuff. It would take a couple guys to do it. It was cold.

HOSKING: Kind of on the weather, and we can kind of keep with the same topic, did you find the summers that bad? I mean, it can get pretty hot here.

WALLACE: Well, yeah, it got hot, but it wasn't that bad. It was much better than winter. As a matter of fact, they sent us to a winter survival school, because the missile sites were so far out. We had to do that, and they gave us special equipment, like the bunny boots that they used to wear and the big parkas that were heavily insulated and different types of clothing so that we wouldn't get so cold. But we'd still get . . . you'd have to take the gloves off to put the things together out there. It wasn't fun.

HOSKING: So for the Titan you ended up working, what is it? Hermosa, Wicksville, and I think Spearfish was the third?

WALLACE: Let's see. No, we didn't go up that far. I think we usually went down to Hermosa, as I can recall, down by Pine Ridge, down in that area down there.

HOSKING: I'll have to apologize. My knowledge on Titan is very limited. That's part of why we're doing this, too, is to compare the two systems. So, Hermosa, not too far off the highway there.

WALLACE: No, it wasn't too far down there.

HOSKING: I'm sure that's changed a little bit since you were out here, too. I think it's four lane now all the way.

WALLACE: Oh, is it? (chuckles)

HOSKING: Yeah. When did you first hear about the Minuteman?

WALLACE: Well, they were starting that program up here when I got to this base. That was the first time I'd heard about it. I didn't know that we would be even working with them, because we were with the Titan at that time and just doing other radio work, repair work. Then after they eliminated the Titan missile, that's when they switched us over to the Minuteman and we took care of some of their equipment.

HOSKING: Did you have a choice? Could you have moved elsewhere if you wanted to? Or you were pretty much going from Titan to Minuteman, and that's it.

WALLACE: That was it, yeah.

HOSKING: What kind of training did you have to go through? Or what kind of training do you remember having to go through to switch from one to the other?

WALLACE: Well, it was basically what we were taught in school. It was basic radio communications, transmitter receiver stuff. So even though it was different equipment, we knew the basics of it so we could work on it. There wasn't any problem switching over to that.

HOSKING: I'm assuming you had reams of paper for tech sheets.

WALLACE: Oh yeah. (chuckles) All kind of schematics. Basically, the equipment worked fine except for these squirrel cage fans that were in the back of them. We had to do preventative maintenance on them because we had to take them apart and lubricate them, and all that. I don't know. I guess we'd do that probably every month or two. We could either do it there, take the squirrel cages out and lubricate them, or else we could just take the squirrel cage out and take it back to our work site and then just put another one in. That was the quickest way, but that would then take two trips out.

HOSKING: I guess with the transporting of this, was there any specific security you had to deal with to protect the equipment? Or was it just pretty routine equipment?

WALLACE: No, not as far as the little . . . it was just a squirrel cage fan is all it was. It was just keeping the equipment cool. We didn't take the actual whole piece of equipment out, just that one fan, and we could take it back and work on it back in our shops.

HOSKING: We talked briefly before we started, but I guess what was just kind of the routine duty that you had to deal with out here for the Minuteman side of it?

WALLACE: Unless we had problems with the equipment, it was a lot of just preventative maintenance stuff. We'd have four-wheel drive trucks, and we'd have a team of two to three guys. In the wintertime we would have to get our survival equipment and take it with us. We'd stop on base and get some kind of a sack lunch or a type of food. And we'd have to call security and get a password, which usually consisted of two words, like . . . well, I remember one, Mickey Mouse. So when we got out to the Launch Control Center, we would call the officers in charge out there, and they'd want the password. Well, we'd say Mickey. If you said Mickey Mouse, you were in

trouble. And we did have that problem one time. The guy wasn't paying any attention and he said Mickey Mouse. Security came out and made us get out of the vehicle, with their weapons on us, and just had us there until they could clear it up with the officers. They had to call back to our squadron back at Ellsworth. They finally gave us permission to get back in, but security came out and took care of us. They wouldn't let us advance, and they held us with their arms, their pistols and their rifles. It was quite an experience then. (laughs) It made the guy who was in charge look kind of foolish. Which it wasn't me that time, thankfully.

HOSKING: At this time, what rank were you?

WALLACE: Well, I had gone from an airman second class to airman first class, so that would be an E4, I think. That's the rank that I stayed at until I got out of the service.

HOSKING: So not the bottom of the pecking order, but not the top, either.

WALLACE: Kind of in the middle. I think they're classified as a sergeant now.

HOSKING: I know the ranks have gone through a lot of changes. Even recently they've gone through a little bit of change, from what I understand.

WALLACE: So I spent a year and a half doing that type of work.

HOSKING: Did you end up having to get into the capsule down below much?

WALLACE: We always worked down with the two officers in the launch control capsule. They had to let us in, and they they'd shut the door behind us, which is another interesting thing happened down there.

HOSKING: I was going to say, yeah, go ahead.

WALLACE: Well, one time we were down there and we had taken our equipment out and set it on the little workbench down there. We were taking the squirrel cage out, the fan, when all kinds of sirens and red lights went off. We didn't know what happened. One of the officers drew his weapon on us and made us quit doing what we were doing and go back by the entrance, the big locked door back there, and sit and wait. He went back up, and they started some procedures, and somebody came on over their radio system saying that President Kennedy had just been killed. Evidently, they thought that we were under attack, so they started the countdown of the missiles.

[pause]

HOSKING: *Recording stopped due to a recording malfunction. It's restarted with JFK story.*

[pause]

WALLACE: About when I was down in the Launch Control Center, in the capsule. We had taken our equipment out to take the squirrel cage fan out so we could repair it, or take it back with us, when the alarm went off and flashing lights. The commander down there, he pulled his weapon and told us to get to the back of the capsule near the door. Then he went back up to his post, and someone came on the intercom and said that President Kennedy had just been killed. So they started with their countdown stuff, I guess, is what they were doing. We just sat back there, and they were getting down pretty close, I suppose. When General Powers—I think it was General Powers at that time, I'm not positive now—he came on, he was in charge of SAC, and he said to stop the countdown for the firing of the missiles because they had found out that we weren't under attack or anything like that. That was kind of an interesting story. Then they let us go back to work.

HOSKING: Did they let you watch what they were doing, or did they make you face away? Or do you remember?

WALLACE: Well, I think we had to face the wall. We weren't watching them up there.

HOSKING: If it makes you feel any better, they can't even carry guns now.

WALLACE: Oh, well. (chuckles) They had pistols, and they used their pistols.

HOSKING: They got rid of that in the 1980s. Too many people got bored down there and too many . . .

WALLACE: Started playing with their weapons?

HOSKING: Yeah.

WALLACE: Hmm, not a safe thing.

HOSKING: Did you do any work with the outside, like the antennas and that? Or was it primarily with the racks down below?

WALLACE: Yeah, just the equipment down in the . . . we call it the tube down there.

HOSKING: Yeah, I've heard the hole, the capsule, various terms for it. Did you end up having to always work with a partner when you were doing this work, like a two-man concept?

WALLACE: With us, we always had at least two men. It seems to me now they wouldn't let more than two down at one time, so if there were three of us, one guy stayed up above.

HOSKING: Do you think that was more for just your convenience and safety working with this equipment, or do you think it would have been security to have two people?

WALLACE: They'd let us have two people down there, but some of the equipment's pretty heavy, so it would take two of us sometimes to handle the thing. That was the main reason, I think.

HOSKING: The equipment you were working with, it was communications equipment, correct?

WALLACE: Yeah. Transmitters and receivers.

HOSKING: So when you were working on this equipment, did they go on to one of the other modes of communication?

WALLACE: I think they had backup equipment. They were able to back that piece of equipment up. I'm sure they did.

HOSKING: I know on this system there were three different methods of communication, and one of them was over the HICS cabling, the Hardened Intracore Cabling System. There's another one that I think was a satellite, and the third was a ground penetrating. I assume they would have backed up on one of those for the time being.

WALLACE: I don't know what type of transmissions they have. We just worked with the receivers and the transmitter there.

HOSKING: When you were down there, how long did it typically take?

WALLACE: Oh, we'd probably spend maybe up to two hours. It depends on whether we just swapped them out, changed the things out, or if we had to . . . well, if we had troubles with it, we'd have to take the entire system out. Then we'd usually put another one right back in that we'd bring with us.

HOSKING: So if it was a fix that you thought you could do there, would you always bring a backup piece of equipment just in case?

WALLACE: No, I don't remember that. I think we could usually tell in advance what the problem was. Like I said, most of the time it was just for preliminary preventative maintenance things anyway.

HOSKING: Okay. For me, I usually get the worst case scenario when I work on electronics, so I always have a backup ready to go. That's why I asked.

WALLACE: It got to be pretty routine, really, if we did it enough times.

HOSKING: Actually, that might answer this next question. After hearing some of the basic duties, we were just wondering how prepared were you for this position? Did you think that the training was really good, got you where you needed to be? Or do you think you needed more training, that type of thing?

WALLACE: Well, we always had ongoing training, it seemed like, OJT, while we were working at the regular maintenance places. It was just knowing the basics of electronics that we needed to know to fix most of these things.

HOSKING: Kind of thinking back on the job, what do you think consumed most of your time on maybe a specific job or just in your routine? What took the most time out of your day?

WALLACE: Probably travel. I don't know what the farthest site was. Probably a hundred miles away from base, I think, something like that. Occasionally, we could hit two sites if we needed to. We would drive across some of the smaller roads. In the wintertime when the rivers would freeze over, we'd cross the Belle Fourche and the other river down here.

HOSKING: The other one I can think of is the Cheyenne.

WALLACE: Yeah, the Cheyenne. Because they were frozen. That way we could come up here to Wall, to Delta, and wouldn't have to go back around some other ways. We'd make the trip shorter that way. But those were just things we learned as you did it a few times.

HOSKING: I know you said it was a pretty easy switch from Titan to the Minuteman system, but did you ever see a challenge between that conversion, for you?

WALLACE: Well, yeah, and the fact that I had never worked with television before. In the Titan system we had to go re-school for closed circuit TV. That's why I went to Omaha. That being my first term, I wasn't all that familiar with any radio stuff until you got there and you started working with it. They usually put you with somebody who's experienced, so you learn, and you pick up pretty quick. It was mostly basic stuff.

HOSKING: So I guess your biggest challenge is getting into the job. Once you were into it, transition was fine, easy?

WALLACE: Mm-hmm.

HOSKING: As it can be. (chuckles)

WALLACE: Oh yeah. As a matter of fact, after I left here, they sent me to the 1st Mobile Communications Group in the Philippines. We worked on all different kinds of equipment over there. We'd take equipment to different areas of the world. Like we went to Vietnam and we'd go to Hawaii and Johnson Island, one place after another, working with different equipment. Once you learned the basics, it was pretty much the same.

HOSKING: And I guess we'll reiterate this. I don't think I caught this on tape. What was your unit here at Ellsworth?

WALLACE: 821st Communications Squadron.

HOSKING: Then when you went to the Philippines, was it the same unit, or did you end up switching units?

WALLACE: We switched. I went to the 1st Mobile Communications Group. The squadron and group had changed while I was over there.

HOSKING: Again, the squadrons, the groups, the wings, that's all something I've been learning, too. While you were here at Ellsworth—this is kind of a standard question that we ask—how did you feel the race relations were within the unit? Or was it an interracial unit?

WALLACE: Oh yeah. I think we had a Mexican fellow and a couple black fellows, and we got along fine. There were no problems that I knew of.

HOSKING: And they were just one other guy helping you out type thing?

WALLACE: Yeah. We helped each other out. I don't think we mixed after work too much. You'd just pick up friends, but a lot of times they weren't even associated with your squadron.

HOSKING: The other one, we hear about joking around and that, and I guess we always wonder about how seriously did people take their job? Did you see people that just didn't care about their job and messed around for a while, before they got caught?

WALLACE: Well, there seemed to be some people who weren't as qualified as others. I don't know if they just didn't pick up the electronic part of it like other people did. But they were usually assigned with somebody. Especially when you were first learning, you just didn't go out and they'd say here you go, take over. But for the most part, there was always somebody you could go to if you had some kind of questions, so there was no problem there.

HOSKING: So the average person that you worked with was pretty serious about doing a good job?

WALLACE: Oh yeah. I think so, yeah.

HOSKING: And was committed to what they were doing.

WALLACE: Yeah.

HOSKING: I guess in the broader sense, especially since this is what I would consider early in the Cold War, how real do you think the Soviet threat was? Being in the military and always being bombarded by that.

WALLACE: We thought it was very real, because when we were in Biloxi is when they did the Cuban Missile Crisis. While we were in school they did that, so we knew there was something going on. Then we came up here and started working with these missiles, which I didn't know existed until I got up here.

HOSKING: I guess that makes me wonder, did you rethink military service? I guess you didn't have much choice since you had already gotten your draft notice.

WALLACE: No, not at all. Espirit de corps was pretty good, I think. I liked the military side of it. I still do a lot of things with different groups that I was with, even now, reunions and things like that. My wife and I co-hosted a reunion for one of our groups, and there were like three hundred people there in Kansas City this year.

HOSKING: Okay. And with this type of group, is this a group specific to the maintenance side, the communications?

WALLACE: AACS, Air Force . . . well, they started Army Airways, which started before the Air Force came in existence. Then after that it they changed it to . . . well, now that's a good one. I can't think of that right now. AACS is the name of the group, though. We worked with them quite a bit. We did this one reunion, and then we've helped with some others. It's a good group. I think we've got twenty-seven hundred members in it, so it's a big group.

HOSKING: Obviously nationwide.

WALLACE: Oh yeah. The majority of them are control tower operators, but they have the maintenance guys and they have various other people who dealt with that type of equipment and things.

HOSKING: Because we're always looking for new avenues to find people for oral history interviews. I'm a member of the Association of Missileers for that reason. It's not that I've had any service. That's why I'm asking.

WALLACE: I can probably give you some Web site things that you could contact some people that they might be able to get some more information for you.

HOSKING: A publication or something that we might be able to throw a little blurb about us in there and say do you know anything? Do you want to talk?

WALLACE: Well, as a matter of fact, our editor of our magazine, he's always looking for little things like that. If you have something that you want me to . . . maybe he'd publish it.

HOSKING: Okay. We need to talk a little bit more about that after the interview, see about pursuing that. To kind of take you back to the joking around, do you remember any practical jokes that people played either on you or you played on them, or that would happen along the way?

WALLACE: Well, since it's only been forty-five years . . . (chuckles)

HOSKING: Well, I know.

WALLACE: No, I really can't, in practical jokes. I remember one incident. I think one of our tech sergeants or something knew one of the fellows at the NCO club, and they needed to fix one of the officer's televisions on base. I think it might have been the commanders, or something like that. He had a big color television that was kind of new at that time. So he took it up to our shop and couldn't get it fixed. I was out there tinkering around with it one day. I think I worked on it probably a couple of hours and finally got it working. It was a tuning problem is what it was. It wasn't real difficult. It was just getting it tuned properly, which at that time . . . most people didn't know anything about it anyway. But I got the thing working for him. And he was promoted the next cycle. He made master sergeant. (laughs) That was kind of a funny thing. I wasn't mad about it or anything like that.

HOSKING: So did you take credit for that?

WALLACE: Oh, I'm sure he took the credit for it, but that didn't make any difference. I was just doing something I enjoyed doing anyway.

HOSKING: Did you end up living on base while you were up at Ellsworth?

WALLACE: Yeah, I was on base the whole time.

HOSKING: How was life there? Did you end up getting involved in, like, softball-type activities?

WALLACE: Well, I did play on a softball team. But the higher up in rank you got, the more things they had for you to do. We had to do laundry, had to do some of that. Coming out here, up by . . . oh, this national cemetery up the road here on 90, up by Sturgis, one of our duties was burial duty. I had to do that one time. They were always planning different kinds of things that you had to do.

HOSKING: Keep you occupied?

WALLACE: Well, we kept pretty occupied, yeah.

HOSKING: Out of trouble?

WALLACE: Mostly. (chuckles)

HOSKING: When you were making your runs out to the Launch Control Facilities, or the LCCs, did you ever have to spend the night?

WALLACE: We did, occasionally, yeah. Sometimes we'd have to blast our way through some of the snowdrifts with these four-wheel drives, because they didn't have them all cleared out. It was usually up to us. If we thought we needed to spend the night there, they always had some extra room there and we could do that. We did that occasionally but not too often. Mostly it was a one-day trip, out and back.

HOSKING: Do you remember how the accommodations were at the . . .

WALLACE: Oh, they were great. They were better than they were on base. The food was better. Maybe because it was different, I don't know, but it seemed like it was better. As far as the sleeping and showering and all that kind of stuff, it was nice.

HOSKING: Kind of to wrap things up, we've got just a couple other questions. One's kind of bringing you up to more modern. How do you feel about the arms reduction that's been going on, and started actually with the SALT and the START treaties back in the nineties? Is that something that's a good thing, bad thing?

WALLACE: Oh gosh, I don't know if I want to get into that right now. There's a lot of these politics things that I don't agree with. If I'd have had a solution, then I might get into it more. The way it looks now, I don't know what's going to happen. I don't know who's going to figure out what. It's just a big mess, as far as I'm concerned. I really do support the troops that are over there,

though. I've got relatives that's gone over. You gotta back them up, as far as I'm concerned, but I wish they didn't have to be there. But then, you know . . . I'm not going to get into it.

HOSKING: I know. I guess just the last couple of questions, I'll give you a couple of minutes to pick your brain about it, but just some memories that you have. What would you think would be your worst memory about the whole experience?

WALLACE: At Ellsworth here?

HOSKING: Yeah, if you can . . .

WALLACE: Or in the military?

HOSKING: If you can narrow it to Ellsworth, it's preferable.

WALLACE: Oh gosh, I don't know. I enjoyed my stay. Well, I enjoyed the work, and I enjoyed the people I worked with, and I enjoyed traveling. I didn't really have any bad memories.

HOSKING: Okay. Besides the freezing up on the pole?

WALLACE: Oh well, yeah. Working in the winter.

HOSKING: If that's the worst you have, then that's pretty good.

WALLACE: I'm over in Kansas, and it gets cold in the wintertime. It gets way below zero, and then up in the hundreds. So this weather, I was used to. I know when we put in after school for assignments, I put in for overseas, which I didn't get, so I put in for something around our area, which is fairly close. South Dakota and Kansas aren't too far apart. I more or less got what I wanted.

HOSKING: Would you have preferred to travel farther away?

WALLACE: Yeah. I wanted to go overseas. I put in for Germany and those places. Then after I was here for a year and a half, I got shipped to the Philippines. Fortunately, it was with that 1st Mobile Communications Group, and they traveled around all different places.

HOSKING: And you got to see a little bit when you were there.

WALLACE: Yeah, and I enjoyed that.

HOSKING: Again looking back, is there one memory that kind of sticks out as being your best memory of the whole experience?

WALLACE: Well, let's see. The best memory of being up here at Ellsworth was . . . well, the guys that I worked with were all pretty close, so we formed a basketball team. There were four or five of us that got together and played basketball. We joined a church league downtown, and we won the championship, our church did down there, so that was kind of an interesting thing. As a matter of fact, it's been so long that I was trying to find the church down there and I couldn't find it. I'm going to go back down in a couple of days and see if they've still got the trophy in their trophy case down there, and talk to some of the guys down there. If I can find it. That was a good experience.

HOSKING: And that was here in Rapid City?

WALLACE: Yeah, down in Rapid City, in one of the churches.

HOSKING: They don't have a lot there, but to have gym facilities, that's something kind of unique.

WALLACE: They did have a gym facility.

HOSKING: I haven't seen many of those, but that doesn't mean they're not there, and it doesn't mean I haven't noticed. Just the sanctuary and not the rest of it.

WALLACE: Well, I can't remember now if it was part of the church or if we played in a . . . it was a big gym.

HOSKING: Like a YMCA type thing?

WALLACE: Something like that maybe, I'm not sure. We're going to go down and research that a little bit. We're going to be here for several more days. That was probably one of the highlights.

HOSKING: Well, living at Ellsworth, did you get an impression on how Rapid City viewed the Air Force? Was it a good relationship between you as an airman and the local community?

WALLACE: The people down there where we went to church at, a family would usually have us over for Sunday dinner most any time we wanted to. There was always somebody wanting to know if we wanted to come over for dinner on Sunday, so we took advantage of that. It was probably the first time I'd been associated with any American Indians. That was kind of a culture shock. Of course, we didn't see the best. You get downtown Rapid City, they're probably not the best of their population, I don't think. A lot of drinking going on and stuff like that.

HOSKING: I was going to say, depending on what they're doing, yeah.

WALLACE: Then we had to go down to the reservation at the Titan site, down by Hermosa. We'd go down to Pine Ridge and saw how they had to live. It was kind of a shock. The ones we talked to down there, they were pretty friendly. They didn't seem to be having any hostilities that I could see.

HOSKING: I know I've talked to some people more in the recent history that said that there was a little tension between Ellsworth and the local population.

WALLACE: I didn't really run into that. Of course, most of the people we associated with were with the churches and things. As far as businesses went, if you had the money, they didn't mind you coming in their shops. (chuckles)

HOSKING: I was going to say, as long as you're willing to pay for something. Just kind of thinking about what we've talked about, is there anything I might have missed that you're interested in letting us know about?

WALLACE: Well, driving in, I was looking . . . there used to be a racetrack out there. I don't know if there still is. We used to go down and . . . there were dog races, greyhound races that we used to go to occasionally. I didn't see that, but the town has evolved so much that I just maybe missed it, I don't know. I didn't know if that was still there or not.

HOSKING: I don't know. I've not seen any type of track.

WALLACE: That was a long time ago.

HOSKING: And you're right. I know Rapid City, especially, is really growing out.

WALLACE: Yeah. I got lost down there. I didn't even know when I was in town and out of town for a while there. The major roads and things I remembered.

HOSKING: Well, great. We really appreciate the time. This is definitely a facet. I didn't know a lot about the communications, so I didn't know how that worked, not realizing that you were a separate unit. Not really totally tied to the missile fields, but at the same time you were.

WALLACE: Yeah. Our unit was the 821st Communications, but a SAC group. We did all different types of work, not just primarily missile stuff. We could do most anything that they needed.

HOSKING: I guess at the time, you would have had the B52 bombers?

WALLACE: B52's and the KC135's, I guess that's what they're called, the refuelers?

HOSKING: Yeah. Did you deal with those at all?

WALLACE: No, we didn't do any aircraft. They had a separate school for aircraft maintenance repair.

HOSKING: So you were mainly ground based communications.

WALLACE: Yeah. I remember one time in the Philippines, they flew in over there and we'd just opened the base and they had some type of problems, so they came and got us, wanted us to work on their equipment. I got into that . . . well, I don't know which aircraft it was, one of the big ones that hauled troops. I didn't know much about that. And we didn't have the equipment to work on it with or anything else, so there wasn't much I could do at that time.

HOSKING: So training didn't carry over.

WALLACE: Yeah. Aircraft communications is different from ground radio communications.

HOSKING: Okay. Well, if there's nothing else, then again I'd like to thank you for letting us know and taking a little bit of time out of your trip to chat with us.

WALLACE: That's fine. Well, we're going to go on this tour, so we just didn't mind at all. I enjoyed it.

FEMALE VOICE: It's a great thing you're doing, it really is.

[end]